

УДК 811.111
DOI: 10.15421/382107

V. Lobanova
В. В. Лобанова
В. В. Лобанова

*Oles Honchar Dnipro National University
Дніпровський національний університет імені Олеся Гончара
Днепропетровский национальный университет имени Олеся Гончара*

LOL AS A SPECIFIC LINGUISTIC PHENOMENON

ЛОЛ ЯК ОСОБЛИВЕ ЛІНГВІСТИЧНЕ ЯВИЩЕ

ЛОЛ КАК ОСОБОЕ ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКОЕ ЯВЛЕНИЕ

The article deals with a relevant problem as the language of the Internet is becoming more and more influential. More and more texts are being written in some of Internet languages so the philologists have to pay attention to such sublinguistic forms however funny and stupid they may seem at first sight. The language of the Internet has been studied for a long time, anyway we consider that the analysis of peculiarities of the Internet language in connection with usual text is worth special attention. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the Lolspeak as a problem for linguistic study and to give special consideration to this type of the Internet slang from the point of view of its grammar and spelling. LOL is sort of a term which refers to a group of words named abbreviations or acronyms. It was used historically as a very restricted notion but appears to be widely used now practically in all other forms of computer-mediated communication, in private correspondence and even in literature. A specific feature of lolcat style is the usage of lolcat images. These cats perform characteristically human actions or use various gadgets including computers. These texts emotion load is expressed by the capitalisation and exclamation, or by some means of creolized English. To summarize the linguistic peculiarities of lolspeak we enumerate them like this: a) spelling; b) syntax; c) lexicon. The article proved the existence of a specific sublanguage of contemporary English which has got the abbreviated name LOL. There are various deciphering and variants of this term. The Lolspeak seems to be spoiled or broken as it has a certain system of misspelling, extraordinary syntactic structure and new words. The necessity of LOL study is explained by its spread in colloquial correspondence and steady moving into many other language and speech layers. The prospects of the research are seen in defining the optimal way of translation of LOL texts.

Keywords: Internet, sublanguage, LOL, spelling, syntactic structure, lexicon.

Розглянуто актуальну проблему, оскільки мова Інтернету стає все більш впливовою. Дедалі більше текстів пишеться мовами Інтернету, тому філологам доводиться звертати увагу на такі субмовні форми, якими б смішними та дурними вони не здавалися на перший погляд. Мова Інтернету вивчається давно, але ми вважаємо, що аналіз особливостей мови Інтернету у зв'язку зі звичайним текстом вартий особливої уваги. Мета цієї роботи – проаналізувати Lolspeak як проблему для лінгвістичного вивчення та приділити особливу увагу цьому типу Інтернет-сленгу з точки зору його граматики та орфографії. LOL – це своєрідний термін, який належить до групи слів, названих аббревіатурами або акронімами. Історично воно використовувалося як дуже обмежене поняття, але наразі воно широко застосовується практично в усіх інших формах комп'ютерного опосередкованого спілкування, у приватному листуванні та навіть у літературі. Особливістю стилю lolcat є використання зображень котів. Ці коти виконують характерні для людини дії або використовують різні пристосування, включаючи комп'ютери. Навантаження емоцій цих текстів виражається великими літерами та окликом або креолізованою англійською мовою. Щоб узагальнити мовні особливості lolspeak, ми перелічили їх так: а) правопис; б) синтаксис; в) лексика. Тож lolspeak має певну систему орфографічного написання, надзвичайну синтаксичну структуру та нові слова. Необхідність ви-

вчення LOL пояснюється його поширенням у розмовній відповідності та неухильним переходом до багатьох інших мовних шарів. Перспективи дослідження вбачаються у визначенні оптимального способу перекладу текстів LOL.

Ключові слова: Інтернет, підмова, ЛОЛ, правопис, синтаксична структура, лексика.

Рассмотрена актуальная проблема, поскольку язык Интернета становится все более влиятельным. Все больше и больше текстов пишется на некоторых языках Интернета, поэтому филологам приходится обращать внимание на такие субязыковые формы, какими бы смешными и глупыми они ни казались на первый взгляд. Язык Интернета изучается давно, однако мы считаем, что анализ особенностей языка Интернета применительно к обычному тексту заслуживает особого внимания. Цель данной статьи – проанализировать лолспик как проблему для лингвистического изучения и уделить особое внимание этому типу интернет-сленга с точки зрения его грамматики и правописания. LOL – это своего рода термин, который относится к группе слов, называемых аббревиатурами или акронимами. Исторически это использовалось как очень ограниченное понятие, но сейчас оно широко используется практически во всех других формах компьютерной коммуникации, в частной переписке и даже в литературе. Особенностью стиля lolcat является использование изображений кота. Эти кошки выполняют типично человеческие действия или используют различные устройства, включая компьютеры. Эмоциональная нагрузка текстов выражается заглавными буквами и восклицанием или некоторыми средствами креолизованного английского языка. Обобщая лингвистические особенности lolspeak, мы перечисляем их следующим образом: а) орфография; б) синтаксис; в) лексика. Таким образом, в статье доказано существование специфического подязыка современного английского языка, получившего сокращенное название LOL. Перспективы исследования видятся в определении оптимального способа перевода текстов LOL.

Ключевые слова: Интернет, подязык, ЛОЛ, правописание, синтаксическая структура, лексика.

Introduction. The article deals with a relevant problem as the language of the Internet is becoming more and more influential. More and more texts are being written in some of Internet languages so the philologists have to pay attention to such sublinguistic forms however funny and stupid they may seem at first sight. The language of the Internet has been studied for a long time (see papers by D. Crystal [1], S. Herring [2], V. Viotti [8] etc. Tagliamonte and Denis pay special attention to LOL language [7]. This list is not complete, anyway we consider that the analysis of peculiarities of the Internet language in connection with usual text is worth special attention.

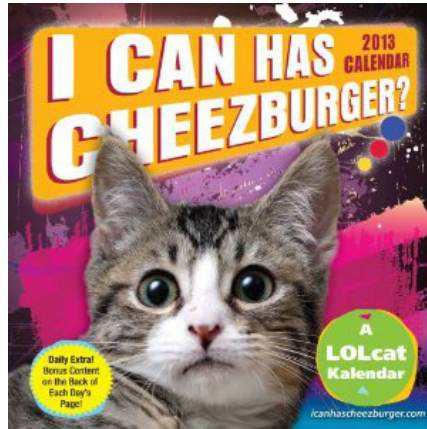
The main content. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the Lolspeak as a problem for linguistic study and to give special consideration to this type of the Internet slang from the point of view of its grammar and spelling.

LOL is sort of a term which refers to a group of words named abbreviations or acronyms. It is deciphered as *laughing out loud*. This term denotes a specific part of contemporary Internet slang. It was used historically as a very restricted notion but appears to be widely used now practically in all other forms of computer-mediated communication, in private correspondence and even in literature. Lolspeak is a special form of TT (typed text) language which norms do not correspond to those of standard English, and usually it is accompanied by cute cat pictures. It can be expressed by a lot of other abbreviations somehow connected with emphatic expressions of laughter such as *LMAO* (“laugh(ing) my ass off”), and *ROTFL* or *ROFL* (“roll(ing) on the floor laughing”) [3]. Similar to texting, lolspeak is writing words with different letters (but sound the same) than the original spelling [6].

The first use of the term “lolcat” was registered on an anonymous image-board with the name *4chan*. The first appearance of the word is considered to be June 2006.

Already on June, 14, 2006 the domain name “LOLcats.com” was noticed on the net. The term lolcat became popular all over the USA. Entertainment Weekly put them on its end-of-the-decade, “best-of” list. “Lolcat” was also a runner-up under the “Most Creative” category under the American Dialect Society Word of the Year Awards, losing out to “Googlegänger”[4].

A specific feature of lolcat style is the usage of lolcat images. These cats perform characteristically human actions or use various gadgets including computers. A lot of the abovementioned cat images have become quite recognizable and acquired different variations and imitations. An example of such image is shown below.



It is necessary to admit that this style of language or sublanguage is connected with many sources, their emotion load is expressed by the capitalisation and exclamation, or by some means of creolized English.

To summarize the linguistic peculiarities of lolspeak we enumerate them like this: a) spelling; b) syntax; c) lexicon.

One of the most important peculiarities of lolspeak is spelling mistakes made on purpose [5]. Let's analyze the following example: *dunno what happnd, we dint touch it* (*Don't know what happened, we didn't touch it*); *i can has ice scream?* (*Can I have ice cream?*). Here the words are spelt close to their pronunciation, sounds are shortened, mute letters are dropped, capital letters are avoided etc. The style became popular with people who often couldn't spell words properly, and now has turned into a “cool” method of social communication between humans. It has now lost its true meaning of pure sarcasm and people actually talk in this as if it's “cool”. It is a pure usage of letters and manipulation of words to how it sounds when spoken through “speech” [5].

It is possible to formulate some rules of the Lolspeak spelling. The most important rule may be called homonymous misspellings when the simpler homonym out of the two is chosen. Other sources of inventing mistakes on purpose are common typing errors, baby-talk, kindergarten misspellings and community-specific mannerisms found on online message boards. The trick is to use correct parts of one word and misspell another part or a word that have common phonetic units (or there we may observe rhymes).

Typical examples of such intentional mistakes are the following ones:

- *ghost* -> *goast* or *ghoast* (may rhyme with “toast” or “coast”)
- *feet* -> *feat* (rhyming with “meat” or “heat”)
- *moan* -> *mown* (reminding both “own” and “mow”)

- *crowd* -> *croud* (borrowing from “cloud” or “found”)
- *nothing* -> *nuthing* (in this case the typical sound of the letter “u” as in “umbrella” or “hut” is used) [5]. Such entertaining changes produce the best impression when they are taken from real English words and only certain consonant clusters are used or imitated. However, it’s also sometimes important to avoid examples where the misspelling of one word would produce the correct spelling of another word (i.e. “*crowd*” and “*crowed*”).

The fact is that as a result of such changes the lolspeak words seem to sound the same when read, but having quite different look which in many cases creates a humorous effect. Let’s pay attention to some more examples of contemporary English lolspeak: *lemmeshowyu dem*.

“Eye” [ai] sounds are almost always spelt as ai, unless it just doesn’t fit into the word. However, it appears that “ight” configurations don’t benefit from using ai. Instead, change “ight” to “iet”: *Hi* -> *hai*; *I* -> *ai*.

Words that end in a silent “e” that have a consonant before often exchange the two last letters. However, it works better for some words than for others, so some discretion is advisable: *kite* -> *kiet*; *like* -> *like*; *come* -> *come*; *came* -> *came*; *bake* -> *baek*; *plate* -> *plaet*. A good exception to this rule is “*dude*” which is rendered into “*dood*” or “*d00d*”.

Another note of interest is words that end in “er”. Either you’ll end up dropping the “e”, replacing it with “u”, or changing the ending to “ah”. Both ways are acceptable, e.g. *over* -> *ovah*, *ovur*, *ovr*; *hover* -> *hovah*, *hovr*; *peeker* -> *peekah*, *peekr*.

Diphthongs (multiple vowel sounds in one syllable) are often exaggerated or misplaced: *Baby* -> *baybeh*; *Youtube* -> *Yewtoob*, *Yewtewb*, *Yootoob*; *loud* -> *lowd*; *couch* -> *cowch*.

Words that end in – y are often instead written to end in – eh: *kitty* -> *kitteh* or *kittah*; *funny* -> *funneh*; *baby* -> *baybeh*, *behbeh*. “Th” sounds are usually replaced with “f”, but can occasionally be replaced with “tt” or “dd”. Rarely will the “th” be kept. *Nothing* -> *Nofin*, *nuttin*, etc; *Three* -> *tree*, *free*, *fwee*, *twee*; *With* -> *wif*.

An “s” (or an occasional “z”) may be affixed to nouns of a certain magnitude of importance (perhaps to express a cat’s misunderstanding of an important thing of which only 1 exists). This works excellently with the “th” rule above (borrowing from popular usage in “Internets/interwebs”): *Earth* -> *Urfs*; *Eternity* -> *eternitys* (although *forevur* probably works better since guidelines recommend avoiding eschatological jargon. Add “d” or “ed” to atypical spellings of past-tense verbs/verbals or their present-tense forms: *made* -> *maded*; *ate* -> *eated*. As a corollary, the word generated by the previous rule may be ended with an “ing” to form the occasional lolcat future-tense: *eating it* -> *eatending it*; switch “le” endings with “el” or sometimes “ul”; *little* -> *littel* or *littul*; *handle* -> *handel* or *handul*.

Pronouns are almost destroyed in lolcat. Here are some examples: misspellings: *I* -> *ai* (Sometimes *I* works better); *I am* -> *Iz*; *me* -> *meh*; *you* -> *yu*, U Plural -> *yuz*; *them* -> *dem*; substitutions: *he* -> *him*; *his* -> *him*; *she* -> *her*; *hers* -> *her*; *they* -> *dem*; *their* -> *dem* [5].

Him and her are abused. He went to the store and came back with nothing. He is very bad! Him goed to tehstowrancaembakwifnofin! Him is vewee wet!

I am trying to sleep. Could you please be quiet? Iztryin to slepe. Yu be kwyet, kthx?

She likes his taste in clothes a lot. I bet she dates him for that! Her liek him tayst in clorfeslotz. Ai fink her dait him for dat!

They keep looking over here. Maybe there is a stain on my shirt? Deykeplukinovahheer. Oh noes! Iz has stane on mahshurt, oh noes!

One more notion on contemporary Internet is so called textspeak. This refers to widely used shortenings at various levels in correspondence. But we are to differentiate between lolcatspeak and txtspeak. Let's compare some examples:

Standard English: Hi, I was wondering if you could come down here at about 3PM. Will that be fine?

TxtSpeak: hi was wndrng u cud cmedwn @ 3, k?

lolcat: O hai! Izwunderin, yu can has go to heer at 3? Kthxbai.

TxtSpeak's message main aim is to compress the text as much as possible by means of shortening the number of characters and thus the number of keys to be pressed for creating the message.

The next issue of our investigation is the analysis of some stable syntactic formulas. They can be schematically shown like this.

1. {subject} + (can) + (has) + [noun phrase] + (?)

The structure of a popular Lolspeak text may be used as a scheme for many other Lolspeak formulas. The embodiment of the formula is "*I can hascheezburger*". Although the punctuation proves it to be a question, the auxiliary verb "can" is not inverted, the word order is direct. Only the presence of the question mark gives indication that this sentence is interrogative.

2. {subject} + (has) + (a) + [noun phrase]

Here we see a scheme of an affirmative sentence. The punctuation is not of great importance here, and it doesn't differ much from standard English. For example: "*I has a bag*."

3. [noun phrase] + {subject} + (has) + {pronoun}

Here besides the repeated form *has* we observe the unusual word order when the meaning of the noun phrase is underlined by its pushing to the first place in the sentence. This scheme is becoming more and more popular in lolspeak and to a certain degree it influences standardized English sentences. The instance of it is as follows:

"chrissmessperit...I hazet"

4. (I'm) + (in) + [determiner phrase] + {verb present progressive} + [determiner phrase]

This formula was first used in the phrase "*I'm in urwidoze flashing urnayberz*". It was originally a phrase used by Starcraft computer game players to insinuate they had just embarrassed a player without that player's prior knowledge of said embarrassment: *I'm in your base, killing your dudes* [6].

So here, it seems that, throughout English, Lolspeakers assimilate things they find interesting into Lolspeak. It is possible that these Starcraft players thought their in-group gaming language might fit well in cat macros, or someone else thought the Starcraft players needed to share the phrase. Also worthy to note is that this formula has been brought into commercial culture by being printed on a shirt. The shirt has blank white spaces for the parts of speech, showing the versatility of the formula, and the extent to which it has been made available to wider audiences [5].

And last but not least we are to mention that LOLspeak also has got its own special vocabulary, which can be classified from three main points of view:

- words borrowed from leet, the language of elite group of hackers and other Internet genres;
- words related to "cat images";

- lexical choices specific to such a unique unit as the so called LOLcat Bible.

A noticeable group of lolspeak widely used lexical units have originated from other popular Internet sections. The words like “*p0wn*”, “*kthxbai*” and “*teh*” have originated from so called leet and other similar gamers groups.

Kat instead of cat, *fud* replacing food, house expressed by *houz* are typical examples of words related to cat images.

A rich source of lolcat vocabulary is the LOLcat Bible which can be found on the popular site the ICHC (icanhascheezburger.com) universe. Some of these are the kinds of lexical items that cats in the real world might be drawn to, but here they take on a mythical status. For example:

An let min p0wnz0r becuztehy has can openers

“And let men rule (because they have can openers)”

Here the can opener is a sign of power. We also find items like sofas taking on mythical status (as the Bible guidelines note, “a typical domestic cat probably hasn’t seen a desert tent, but they have probably seen a sofa”) and dogs becoming the ultimate enemy [3]. The ICHC universe contributes items that are not necessarily what we would expect of real-world cats but have taken on special status in this domain. Thus we see an obsession with “invisible” items (“invisible bike”, Genesis 01:02), “cheezburgers” (cheeseburgers), and “kittels” (kitties, Genesis 01:09). These items are usually common, everyday items that have taken on specific salience for the language community through repeated use [5].

Conclusions. The article proved the existence of a specific sublanguage of contemporary English which has got the abbreviated name LOL. There are various deciphering and variants of this term. The Lolspeak seems to be spoiled or broken as it has a certain system of misspelling, extraordinary syntactic structure and new words. The necessity of LOL study is explained by its spread in colloquial correspondence and steady moving into many other language and speech layers. The prospects of the research are seen in defining the optimal way of translation of LOL texts.

References

1. Crystal, D. (2006). *Language and the internet*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Herring, S. C. *Language and the Internet*. The International Encyclopedia of Communication. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405186407.wbiecl005>
3. URL: <https://www.definitions.net/definition/LOL>
4. Kilasberitaonline. URL: <https://antosijhon.wordpress.com/2011/06/04/lolcat/>
5. *Lolcat Urban dictionary*. URL: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=lolcat&page=2>
6. Mitchell, S. *LOL Cats circulate the web*. 01 Feb 2012. URL: <https://itbrief.co.nz/story/lol-cats-circulate-the-web>
7. Tagliamonte, Sali A., & Denis, Derek (2008). *Linguistic ruin? LOL! Instant messaging and teen language*. *American Speech*, 83. P. 3–34.
8. Viotti, Vicki. *Language on the web*. USA Today. December 23, 1999.

Надійшла до редакції 30.11.2020